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HENRY CLAY.



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1889.

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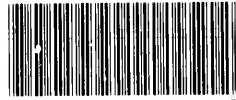
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HENRY CLAY.

Clay, HENRY, statesman, one of the 'great triumvirate' of American orators, was born in 'the Slashes,' a district of Hanover county, Virginia, April 12, 1777. He was the son of a Baptist preacher who died in 1781, and from the employment of some part of his early youth in connection with a grist-mill, he earned the cognomen of 'the mill-boy of the Slashes.' His early schooling was but scanty. When fifteen years old he became an assistant-clerk in the chancery court of his native state, and for four years was amanuensis to that excellent lawyer and true patriot, George Wythe, then chancellor. He also studied law for one year with Robert Brooke, attorney-general of Virginia. In 1797 he was licensed to practise law, and in the same year went to Lexington, Kentucky, where he soon acquired a high reputation as an orator and as a jury lawyer. He was sent in 1806, and again in 1809, to the United States senate for short terms. He first entered the lower house of congress in 1811, and was chosen its Speaker. This position he filled for many years with great ability. He was active in bringing on the war of 1812-15 with Great Britain, and was one of the commissioners who arranged the treaty of

Ghent which ended the war. By his course in regard to the 'Missouri Compromise' of 1821, he won the title of 'the great pacificator.' In 1824 he was one of the strongest advocates of a high protective tariff, and in the same year was one of the four candidates for the presidency. No choice having been made by the electoral college, Mr J. Q. Adams was elected president by the House of Representatives; and Clay's acceptance of the position of secretary of state under Adams was by many held to constitute a proof of a corrupt bargain between two statesmen, neither of whom, in truth, would have been guilty of countenancing such a bargain. Clay re-entered the senate in 1831, and in the same year was renominated for the presidency; but in the following year General Jackson was re-elected to that office. His candidature for the office of president in 1844 was in like manner unsuccessful. The compromise of 1850 between the opposing free-soil and pro-slavery interests was largely Clay's work. He died July 29, 1852. Although he was the most attractive public speaker in his country during what is justly regarded as 'the golden age of American oratory,' his ability as a reasoner was excelled by that of Webster; while his other principal rival, Calhoun, surpassed him in intensity and fiery earnestness. No man had a larger following of devoted personal friends than Clay, and for more than forty years he had a very conspicuous share in shaping the legislation of the republic. As a public man his career was without a blemish. Of the rather numerous biographies of Clay the best is that by Carl Schurz (Boston, 1887).



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